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FEATURING

**ROSALIE
MOORE**

HESITATION AND MOVEMENT IN POETRY

5

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DON WOBBER

PERSONAL TESTAMENT

*"There is someone at this door;
but I cannot ask or seek his name."*

I

The old angular suns rise up, cool them
with your kings, crueler than the circulation of
saviours.

We that move crossways, yes unfold our knives
to cross this secluded and unturning country
like insects: we both have strung our saints sideways,
cautious

as soldiers and far.

O should this bold barley sack simpleton ring out
among the lance-like throats of thieves, saying
"Thieves, are we to stop the vanished voice" —
And should he come like a cutter of stone:

the down flung
side arm wish of all the vanquished
could not ring out the golden rings and rods
of your style and surveillance.

And the men descended under the rocks,
dove like a debt into the bowelless earth.
And no bird sprang forth
or loosened its shell of wings.
Beneath their shoulders
the bones shaped like a harp.
And the long parade of relatives rode
blackly beneath their smiles, twitching
their mouths like twigs.

II

As you truly remember self in the light
of refusal,
truly remember when the blood burned all its
sidings out
and the wheels
ran under the skin like lag-irons —

As you truly remember self, think largely of this
torrent-telling time, when that
old ideal comes striding through the summers
of its widow sticks, when someone blurred of blunder
brings meeting in all his wrung bones.

PERSONAL TESTAMENT

O known by wind and elbow, fled out from your compact
case of self: we have not spindle place
in all our charts of night
for those random sealers. Believe me,
there is no silence that is not greater than their voice,
those of the multiple choice.

III

O how prettily we wear our ghosts;
One sits on my arm like a crooked stem
Its cask eyes a link of treason.

Having come to August with the wings of
Gnats
The perilous arches flinging high
The paper faces of the children moving —

We have wept long for this promise,
And whenever the bones return through
Some window or skylark of mind we weep again
Long on the glades of our hearts.

Once we had come to wetter land,
The emperor taken us to the temple and

Held our fists in his mighty hands;
The barking of dogs, a horizon of canals
Beneath our beaded eyes, and the sparrow
That hung without rest.
Suddenly we saw the value of gold
On his lips like an undrinkable shadow.

O let me hold in my arms this charging ground,
More open to me than all your stars, changing within
Hands the smoke and sorted clouds:
And the sword that lay on the water like
A snake widening his ridge.

They that die in our world
Their faces like coins in a crib,
We shall view them with circling eyes,
Immigrants in fever of night and the lagging sea.
And the mesh in our pockets will cry out and
Order its saints to a personal wish,
The salt throat that knows no flute.

IV

O far out to recession
This land

PERSONAL TESTAMENT

Reeling like a grantless clown

The meadow where knuckles of the skull
Like drops of water fall
And a song rises
Through the effort of its bones.

Long, long the lax hound
Has paced the levy
Those moonless weeds like legs

Old memory without metal
In his veins
Old bells bringing back
The unseasonable latch.

And this out of want
The owned neural son
Forgiven of any forge, come into the land
Like some surfed follower
O relentless, this pig-iron saint.

On your forehead there are marks of skull

Beneath the eyes, weapons you have lost.

V

And how the man on the cross sits, his sky-releasing time,
his beard like an anchor on the stone, whispering "wheat"
and "marrow"; and how he measures the cog-men, the round
men of waste on this broadest hill, as the stone eyes
of centuries roll their broadcast blue and below; and the
others, the waiting thieves with wheels that are their hips,
and white shadows worn like rags on their foreheads. O
pagan, christian, seizer of the long moment, the movement
of page and port, the past of all, the lungs and the knack
of your smile.

On this hilltop, this cold place of defeated desire, there
is room for sleep, the birds all float from a stone keep
of eyes. They cross their wings like lances beneath the rings
of solitude, the focussed crown of worshipper. The wind
opens its low walls upon us, our level faces and lips.
The love looms like a weapon's engine of wings.

We have found the preparation of stone, we have found
the silence of low bowls in the grass, we know its edge

PERSONAL TESTAMENT

and harbor, and have seen its faces,
wheat and preparation. The man comes now
with his wrist that found a forehead of nails, he lifts
his sickle tongue, he speaks with the brand of incision,
through his beards there are angles to fall upon;
on his hands the small crossed scars of the linguist.

We hear the beating of the mowers, the old opened closets
of weather ring down on us shaking their widest swords.
It is the time of the rose and the velvet star:
the cloth pulse drying in the moonlight,
it is the time of the intricate violence of the small birds.

O, in this great mind's toolage, the reason for saints and
bugle calls, the opened noise of flatterers hanging keys
below their ears. This is the season of faults, we have
drunk well, rounded all our parts. A good harvest, they cry,
and their weapons wield into furious numerals. We have
come to the hilltop, risen under the dust of horses, felt the
flight of birds in our collars; the symbol of surgery under
the crossed lamps of trees.

O pagan gods, here is salt to seize your wreckers in,
the heads you ordered up shelved and served. The lease,
landlord, or tenant of fall, the scattered and the
blowing tinsel beneath the bright and lance-like birds.
And we live this life, we the real men, the ventured
and forgotten, men of the paper mouths,
of anguish and display.

*Don Wobber, founder and developer
of NUMBER, is, beginning with this
issue, turning the editorship over to
Robert Brotherson, but he will remain
on the Advisory Committee.*

*Mr. Wobber's work has appeared in
Poetry of Chicago and others. He won
the Phelan Award for Poetry in 1948.*

ROSALIE MOORE

This is the first in a series of features on methods of and approaches to writing of various poets.

*The brilliant and precise detail in Miss Moore's work has excited many readers. How she goes about creating and selecting this detail is the subject of the following essay. The worksheet for her poem *Wedding*, referred to in her essay, is on page 16, and the final version of the poem is on page 18.*

HESITATION AND MOVEMENT IN POETRY

Looking over the worksheet for *Wedding* — the stops, starts, alternatives and choices — it occurs to me that writing a poem is a series of hesitations.

There are places in the manuscript at which material for the poem seems to be spilling out, spreading, even going in several directions, and these places can be recognized by the fact that here the greatest number of possibilities and alternatives are written down. The writer seems to be having a good time with his material — seems to have stopped, in fact, to explore it.

These I shall call points of hesitation. They can be recognized further by the fact that here the most far-flung associations occur. The best example in the present worksheet is, perhaps, in the central section where the bird is met

as a kind of old owl, angel in an ulster, and statuette of Beethoven by Michelangelo, all at the same time. Of course, these are also the places in the poem which may be most difficult to organize later; but so far as the creative process goes, they are the ones at which the poet and the poem are doing fine.

In other words, the poem itself seems to germinate and come into existence at these points of hesitation. The feeling is that the writer comes to a stop at these places — one he could sustain indefinitely. At such a point, the writer may be standing still and doing a jig; he may be humming, whistling, praying, or shouting. Probably he is intensely busy, but he isn't moving away. He is at some center of motion.

It is my own habit to write down many or most of the alternatives that occur to me at such a point of hesitation, saving the choice from among them, (or the final selection of a completely different one), until later. There are two reasons for not choosing in the earliest stages of writing. One is that when you start selecting, you stop inventing, or at least you invent differently. I like to let an image or idea live a little before I control it.

Another reason is that the choice from among the various possibilities is made largely on the basis of connotations — meaning and mood tie-ups with the rest of the poem — which are not always apparent until one has worked

HESITATION AND MOVEMENT IN POETRY

on the poem for some time. The poem, as I write, is in a process of growth. But so am I. I am just discovering its full meaning. So whether I shall ultimately say "Deep where the rain lets down its *baskets, caskets, or castanets*" depends upon what the poem becomes. Will it be a poem with certain underlying feelings of growth and fulfillment (*baskets*), or will it associate with death — love-death, perhaps (*caskets*), or will it develop some type of brittleness which *castanets* would reinforce? Sometimes a connotation pattern of only a few lines will take hold of the writer, and set the tone and meaning of the whole poem.

The above analysis is a gross over-simplification, of course, of a complicated and largely subconscious process.

So much for hesitation in poetry. It is at the points of hesitation that I trust my own work most, because here I believe that I contact my material most directly, and reveal it most honestly.

Movement in poetry, by contrast, acts superficially on the poetic material, manipulating it. Perhaps "superficially" is the wrong word, and I should have said "externally" or something like that.

There are various kinds of movement in poetry, but I am speaking here of the transition — any verbal or musical or logical development by which the writer gets from one moment of hesitation to another. A book could be written on this alone, and probably has been. All I want to point

out for now is that these are not the passages in which poetry develops, however much they may carry forward the particular poem.

In other words, the writer comes to a time when he must move his poem from one point in time and experience to another: make it move. These are passages of choice and decision — the dangerous passages; dangerous because it is possible for the writer to do almost anything here, without the poetic material itself to support him. He is no longer revealing it; he is manipulating it. This is an important part of the writing of a poem, of course, but it is here particularly, I think, that the writer has to be aware of glibness and easy writing. For me, it is best to postpone these passages a little, and explore the material thoroughly first.

Frequently I have written a series of lines quickly and automatically, lines that march right along, one might think, and develop the poem very nicely. But on re-examination, they do not forward the poem as well as it had seemed. *Very often they are actually an evasion of the real content of the poem.* That is why I learned to distrust them. For one thing, their value was almost impossible for me to judge, and often when enough time has passed to judge them, they appeared to be spurious.

To suggest a parallel, writing is something like taking a trip or voyage. The faster you travel, the less, in one sense, you travel — the less you find out. You may go to New

HESITATION AND MOVEMENT IN POETRY

York at top speed, but your "travelling" actually consists in seeing Chicago, stopping by the lakes, seeing the plains in a certain time of day.

How can a writer tell at what points he is moving too rapidly, or skidding over his material? I believe there is such a place in the worksheet for *Wedding*, and that the symptoms of skidding are apparent in the manuscript. It is the passage near the conclusion, beginning: "O lovers: who rides his castle empty" etc. and continues for several lines.

Looking at the worksheet as objectively as I can, I think I recognize a kind of evasiveness in this fast-moving passage (1) by a certain poverty in the imagery. There are a number of alternatives written down at this point in the manuscript, but they are somewhat strained, and there isn't so much fun in reading them over. Secondly, one can notice an over-prominence of syntax; the sentence structure begins to call attention to itself. In writing this passage, I remember I had quite a conflict as to whether the person involved was riding TO or AWAY from his castle. Or over or through. Finally I discarded all adverbs, and just had him ride his castle.

When, in a poem, this evasive motion occurs, I find that I always get tangled in the syntax. A kind of weight of choice then descends on the adverbs, and whatever one chooses seems wrong. The poetry begins to fall into parallel constructions, and various lines appear to be interchange-

able. This condition continued, in the present manuscript, up to the last few lines, but in the last three I plunged back into the real material of the poem, it seemed to me, and concluded it satisfactorily.

Probably what I am saying is that movement in poetry, as transition or development, is least successful when logic is substituted for a more aesthetic way of dealing with things. There is nothing wrong with logic in poetry, but it must not be used as a suppressor or over-drive. It must be amalgamated, suffused, synthesized. It must take its chances with the rest | rush | real.

Miss Moore's work has appeared in New World Writing, The Yale Review, Poetry of Chicago, Furioso, Circle, Commonweal, Contour and many others. Her volume, The Grasshopper's Man, was selected by W. H. Auden for the Yale Series, and she has won the Bender Award for Literature and the University of Chicago's Charles L. Sergel Award for Poetic Drama. This is her third publication in NUMBER.

who rides

who rides like a gleam

And that ~~first~~ ^{the fear the} practised orbit (pearl)
its clearance and landfall certain,
shall meet as the orchard's *hove* (cross, trees, tress)
the richling eye;

O lovers:

Who rides his castle empty of suitcase.
who rides his castle empty of claws/case

Hides ^{from} (claws or crown) for his (lira, pleasure, pedal, pistol, rides

Without neighbors, dim as the weather

② watchful as sleet *at all* ^{lost in the sky}
simmered neighbors, ended in noses, ^{back in the hills}

who rot, who fly/who exhale a fly/who die *exhume*

^{Mount} ^{under} ^{form, form} ^{Rise} in the hills as (and he perils his losses)

crosses

and his losses

Rise in the hills like snow (groves, grove)

and descend as sheep.

The completed poem is on the next page.

Elizabeth Lamson

Deep where the rain lets down its baskets/caskets/castinets
Stain The wedding pair of air lucky (aria lucky) heir
 Walk in a rain of rice,

Pepper the reins,
Flavor /

their losses

~~they are instant~~

Packed by such seeds of envy
As pocket love's bill.

(blue, bell, bill/beads/
stones/shots

Yellow-bone's blue

the bird keeps his hat on rocking
bird rocks, pocks, is a dark land/
landing in boughs OK

resting
ark land/
.....
O He is Pious of thought!

Castles
Calder, p. 11

Him the eacorial masses,
XXXXXXZZZZXXXX

Fest of the mussels and clams,

He sits him piecemeal, oat, oakmeal,
like an otherfeather fether/wister,

~~AN ANGEL, AN ANGEL, AN ANGEL~~

Alto

21

① *garden*

③
greater greater
③
briefing the press

ROSALIE MOORE

WEDDING

For Betty and Irving

Deep where the rain lets down its baskets
The wedding pair, of air lucky,
Walk in a stain of rice,
Pecked by such bills of envy
As pellet love's blue:
Their losses flavor the rains.

The bird keeps his hat on,
Hoisting his dark landing . . .
He is the muss of the festival,
Feast of the muscles and clams . . .
He sits him piecemeal
Like an otherfeather, ulster,
or father,

Bust of a birding Angelo and greeter,
Briefing the pears,
Or ripper of golden fruit
He pikes like a gleam.

And the fruit, the practised orbit
Its clearance and landfall certain,
Shall meet as the orchard's horde
The richling eye:

O lovers,
Who rides his castle empty of crown or clause
Rides from the neighbors
 damp and ended in noses
Watchful as sleet at sill,
Who clot, who lie:

And his losses
Rise in the hills like rows,
And descend as sheep.

AFTER SEASON

Flowers are to look past,
To keep what you did not see
With the beach running your length
And the wind-slipped freesias;

Now that the season has sprung,
 the white changes
Show like a joss, and Spring
That hung its lance up in a bough
Has settled.

If you know any hero know how much of him
Sits in the park with the old man
Under the granite, the sun
Shining him like an unfierce dog,
The snowberries all day
Clutching their marbles;

If you know any girl know
How her hand shields a match not showing,
her mouth

Neither unlit nor lit:

And the birds pass her like tickets,
back after back —

Brash with a sparrow's pension,
And self-sealed August
Moves and melts in the lees,

And turning to flowers, their stitched prospects,
Or aspect as turn of wheels,
Or yellower harbors,
Seeks stems of moon, or glassful of rods,
Or closes on any few stalks to rattle the clutch
with smaller

Skeleton than self.

MARIE GRAYBEAL

POEM ONE

Each day the sun comes up, blueprint size,
And the traveller
Remembers like a burn his promises.

Sees in streets the children
(Eyes color of aluminum or embedded tears)
Slanting their judgements like marbles
Their joints move like a key before the cry of winner.

And in a borrowed air the unmatched skyscrapers
Where the lower pedestrians
Move like tree-inverted headlights,
Carry their rivals on their shoulders,
And the paid receiver goes to his suburb, before the idiot
Who claims with his voice, changes the outside nameplate.

And the day's earthworm, turning in shadow,
Forerunner of death and the long enumeration.

*It is a time of indecision —
All clouds and underwater creatures
Climb the perpendicular weather; the numerous curved birds
Point their rows northward.
And the traveller leaves his thin rooms
Walks by trees tall as pigeons
Remembers the argument that made the solid town fade out.*

POEM TWO

The sea which changes its deeds bumps like a skull against
the beaches,
And sky, blue as rain, stretches farther than an enemy —
The overhead clouds in halves, the landmarks that flatten away
In this country with no edges —
The swimmers, inflated dolls, wrinkle under the water,
remember their dreams,
As forlorn fish on a way to shore reach their mouths for the
unseen air —
And here by the countless sea there are birds who turn
back their anchors;
At times the demure crab
Claps his numerous hinges across sand,
While underneath voices sound in the rocks —
It is well to abandon the sea; many who stray by the
dangerous moss
Will know their ground to turn like a wheel and all their arms
Go down in their little horizons —

This is the first appearance of Miss Graybeal's work in NUMBER. More of her poetry may be found in the May, 1951 issue of Poetry of Chicago.

KENNETH PETTITT

ODE TO A NIGHTINGALE

Now, tall as birds, she's stepping on that sill
which claps its boarded sun and shines
like grain. She simmers, steams her lines
in sheets, in sky unskinned by Zeus (one mill
which layers wider waters than her arms
surround). Her levee's rimmed with willow-wood;
a third of what is done with wood she could
and did: did dive and furrow, deck herself like farms
behind a fence. And there all packaged, set
in purple-ribboned box, she focused legs
like staples. She sat and slipped them. Like kegs
her eyes did slat the wine of self: her pet.
When once unwrapped, this woman zippers wings
upon her broom, her bone and back, then sings.

FOR CERTAIN PEOPLE

The examiners strive in a summery sky,
And are at the attitude of selected stars.
Stars sweet as sodas at their zenith,
Each with an argument of five irrefutable scoops
Of significance — small, but predicting the Right,
And its kinds of incontinence.

The examiners cannot be worked like an animal with legs.
They have unhaunched themselves.
No impairments for them. They have a kind of legging.
A mental device, which, in three bends, can do wonders,
Propelling their heroic and defective statures
Through sweet sense to assigned living.

This is the third publication of Mr. Pettitt's work in NUMBER. His poetry has appeared in such magazines as Quarterly Review of Literature, Pacific, Contour, Poetry, Berkeley and others.

MARIE WELLS

RETURNS AND TANGENTS

And having shared sleep's cypress.
Met love's gauge
On the flowered flanks of the leopard,
Crossed latitudes the plovers memorize,
And thinned of a green vein
Cut for some heaven's peculiar color:
Can you defend time's other clock
Wound in the tree ring?
Or the deceit of dolphins—their roundelay
Hooping and waving the shores of the air?

Or trying the inverted cliff (and the fathomless heel
Held to a ghost's vine
Looping an arm-crossed cordage)
You have taken the path descending in Z's
Ledge down ledge . . . into the caved light:
Hands . . . rubbing old cornerstones for moss . . .
Or lifting in careful motion
Bowls humming as shells — the spearhead
Broken in the stallion's eye.

Below the sun's plain
Where the causeways cross
The old heads hang by their stones
(O heavy, heavy over) The lips like mesas
With-hold the wedged ransom: Flint-deep in the bird track.
O to see how the walls still move
In long-leaping hound—lion-leap on antler:
And all that sidewise chase
Pulls like a moon's turning . . .
With-draws down the long defiles
Like a closing of water.

*"Ideas of Order in Experimental Poetry"
contains more of Miss Wells work,
with a critique of her method. This is
her first appearance in NUMBER.*

LAWRENCE HART

MAP OF THE COUNTRY

*"To ask the hard question is simple
... but the answer
Is hard and hard to remember."*

W. H. Auden

Because originality has been considered the excuse and cause for the pattern of life which many young men choose for themselves, it is important to realize that this way of life is almost always disastrous.

The young man who thinks himself original, will almost always refuse what would give him the knowledge and ability to become original in truth. He is afraid his extra ordinary difference will end, if he takes the opportunities open to him. Later, for this blind faith in his own ability, he will substitute an equally blind un-faith, when his unjustified pride is replaced by the unjustified humility of his failure.

I do not believe even one man in a million is by nature original. But I imagine one in perhaps a hundred men is born with the capacity to learn to be original. And most particularly with young men who wish to write poetry, this capacity is dangerous.

Stone and wood are intractable; but the artist, if he is willing to shape them in the only ways in which they allow of shaping, can say with them almost anything he chooses. By realistically submitting to limitations, he is able to master that with which he works.

I think such discipline, such a submission for obtaining mastery, is most necessary of all in poetry. The medium is most subtle: the skill must be more fine. But because it is most difficult to take hold of the substance of poetry, the novice will almost always assume that what is most important is poetic content: what he says, not how he says it — not accepting that in every art what is said must be identical with the patterns of saying.

I have worked with many gifted young men and women: and the promise of their minds, the brilliance and suddenness of their intuitions, has made working with them — helping them to find the way to say what they wanted to say — as exciting as working with the material of poetry itself.

But only a few of them have known that the partial separateness of their minds was not something which gave them the privilege of genius, or any privilege, but was a challenge which it was almost impossible to meet, even if they could become very wise and very strong.

Very few of them indeed have been willing to aid themselves with

the disciplines demanded by the poetic material. Very few have accepted the discipline of the tradition in which I was teaching, and fewer still would impose upon themselves, or could impose upon themselves, a discipline of their own choosing.

Most of them have imagined their capacity for originality was originality indeed, their incipient genius, genius itself. And most of them have been destroyed, at least in the sense that as extraordinary men and women they have been defeated and have come to occupy an ordinary place in society, though less successfully than ordinary men. But with all the great possibility grotesquely fumbled.

So let us sum up the chances for and against the man who is capable of learning to be original. This capacity can be measured and understood. His chances can be calculated. He can find out the map of the country.

The first thing to establish is the situation of the artist in society — and whether, considering the forfeits society demands from originality, he wishes to accept its challenge, or whether he would be wiser to choose its easy and prosperous limitation. His situation in society is difficult, but less difficult if he understands it.

The American blend of nationalities is producing a surprising proportion of gifted people in each generation. In the teens and the twenties, at least, these people had the habit of gathering in what was really a sort of art ghetto. A very few of them would graduate from this ghetto life. Most of them would degenerate into mediocrity when they left Telegraph Hill or the Montgomery Block, or whatever similar gathering place they had chosen for their creative years. Society, which has very little place for the creative mind, was well served by this ghetto society in which a strain of disturbing people was partly neutralized.

Yet I think that every modern political revolution: the French Revolution, and the Fascist Revolution — has occurred through the instrumentality of the intellectuals, when some of them have united their intelligence to the weight of one of the other classes. So that the automatic self-defense of society is forgivable. The discontented intellectual is dangerous.

Of course the sort of leadership which the creative mind can give society is very necessary if a mechanistic and scientific society is to be sustained without further catastrophes. This society, however, does not recognize any need of this sort of leadership.

Yet the knowledge that the leadership of creative genius is necessary to America is deeply disturbing to the intellectual. He recognizes the

MAP OF THE COUNTRY

value to society of what he has to offer. He realizes society undervalues him monstrously. And these realizations, especially when strengthened in the social interchange of the art colony, have taken away most of his strength. Not to be a part in the structure of society, not to be taken to account in it — or to be taken to such small account — this is the sickness.

The chances, therefore, of success, or of obtaining a sufficient life, are overwhelmingly against the gifted person. So much so that he cannot afford to blunder through his formative period. And he does blunder in almost every case, partly because of his curious double attitude.

He thinks he must foster and protect his singularity — he must not be changed by — he must not learn from — he must not accept any discipline, he must not accept any tradition. But the work of true originality is harder. To meet each new challenge of idea or method — and there is no end to challenge — to weigh, to balance, to submit his dearest prejudices, and the ideas on which his philosophy is founded, to trial by everything new which seems to have value in itself, and yet seems to contradict in some degree the values he accepts.

And this is hard. He compromises. He says at first, I will not accept any influence. I will protect my singularity. And then he accepts an easy fashion — he sacrifices his possibility of becoming truly original — he comes to work within a tradition, but refuses finally the discipline the tradition affords.

Simply, he is afraid. Afraid he is not good enough and that discipline will prove the strength or weakness of his talent. He is afraid to give himself a chance to fail. Afraid he is not original enough. Truly, he is not, but he can learn to be.

And so most gifted men deceive themselves. Calling themselves original, they merely follow fashions in "originality," refusing the challenges to disciplined thought, to disciplined technique. Such men do not actually wish to do original literary work. They wish merely to do fashionable work — and to become well known.

But even if they realize that only this is their objective, there is no reason they should not be successful. It is a valid objective. To accomplish it, it is necessary for them to be very cognizant regarding current poetry and current criticism — to discover the newest fashion, while it is still a fashion of only a few writers.

For instance, it was once the fashion to use a notation "influenced"

by Auden — no attempt made to assimilate the material, from Auden and from other sources, which might be the beginning of a valid new technique — rather a mere imitation of the sort of detail, and the stylistic devices, found in Auden's poems.

Or to use a loose surrealism. A conventional background in psychology and in the surrealists and their predecessors, a little study of the surrealist techniques for making images — but no attempt to make a close organization of the image material. Rather, a dull line or so sandwiched between the active lines to avoid the hard work of close organization when all the phrases are active poetry.

In criticism it was also necessary to have only a fashionable degree of originality, but to know the fashion before it was a fashion. It was once fashionable to say, for instance, that the "Imagists" failed, and that therefore most imagery was not successful. As if nothing had been done with imagery since the "Imagists."

Without going further into possibilities, it is only necessary to say that it is important to become quite sophisticated concerning contemporary writing. It is only necessary to be influenced, not to assimilate. I actually believe that any intelligent and sensitive individual should be able to make a fairly successful "poetic" career in this manner. And if I do not regard this type of career with admiration, it is far more admirable to succeed in this way than to accept the prospect of years of indecisive work.

But there are some poets whose essential interest is poetry rather than reputation. Success for these men is inevitably more difficult and a map of the country in which they wish to travel of supreme importance.

If they decide to accept the challenge to originality, if they decide to free themselves of strictures, to work outside of limitations: I think their first discovery will be the difficulty of originality under the circumstances of supposed freedom. There may be an infinity of the new, but the writer who can be honest will admit that he needs the support of limitations if he is to invent.

These limits may be wide or narrow, according to his skill. Almost every one of a hundred thousand young men must think, at times, that he is one of the four or five in his generation who will be able to work seemingly outside strictures and limitations. Actually, I think the man who can do so will almost have to be convinced of it against his will, before he can accept such singularity.

The clever man is free to prefer a loose influence; to work in a

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particular style, rather than in a particular discipline. But the man who is original works within limitations and fulfills them so that he may prepare himself to accept a wider responsibility.

I must repeat that I believe that very many men have the capacity to learn to be original. But because they believe originality is already a developed possession of theirs — something they were born with — they neglect to do the requisite work which would enable them to possess it in fact.

It might save years of floundering if the writer would approach his problem as empirically as the scientist does, who is not so egotistical as to try to do his work outside of the disciplines which have been evolved for taking hold of his material. He does not try to work without tools. And while, of course, he uses actual physical objects as tools, perhaps it is the disciplines to which he subjects his mind, which chiefly enable him to take hold of his materials.

And as the scientist will first familiarize himself with what has been done, and then see what is yet to be accomplished, so the writer might consider his opportunity for effective originality within the various fields of poetry, that is, within various poetic traditions.

In any particular tradition there will be specialized techniques which have already been well exploited. If he tries to work in these techniques, he will often find it necessary to be compared with masters of poetry in the very forms in which they excel. For instance, if he wishes to write conventional Shakespearean sonnets he will have to be very skillful indeed before his work will be significant in comparison with work which has been done in the form. Only then will his poetry merit competent criticism which he needs for his development. But if he is able, within a particular tradition, to obtain all the excellence he can in some technique in which too much competent work has been done, he will be able to have the critical action of other minds upon his own much earlier, and so he may be able to develop more swiftly.

Indeed if he is looking for techniques which are little exploited, the present situation in poetry is amazing. He is confronted by almost eighty years of poetic experimentation, in French Romantic poetry and contemporary poetry. And almost everything which has been done has been done partially, only partially completed and partially exploited, but suggesting further possibilities.

The emphasis has been on discovery: most discoverers have not become extraordinarily good poets; most followers have only taken one

or another influence, and taken it loosely. Yet this is work in a tradition, recognizable if only partially and vaguely defined. So that the opportunity for the writer is great if he wishes to work out disciplines by which he can take possession of some part of this unexploited continent.

Yet the mere discovery of the opportunities for originality, within the disciplines of a particular poetic tradition, is an important step toward development of actual originality. The writer has begun to comprehend the map of the country which he wishes to possess. He can see the direction in which he is to travel, so that whether he travels swiftly, or whether he travels slowly, every step will bring him nearer to where he wants to be.

But this is the choice which is to be made by the gifted man: he must decide whether he is to foster his egotism or his genius. Even if he chooses only to be fashionable, something can be done. It is the blind belief in his inborn originality which is the danger. Even if he chooses to be only as original as he can learn to be, even if he cannot become one of the several men in his generation who seem to work without limitation (working actually within very wide limitations and disciplines) yet he can be one who accepts all challenges, learning from everyone and everything he encounters: not born to genius, but great because he has chosen to be great.

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Lawrence Hart, whose theories and teaching disciplines resulted in the so-called "Actavist" approach to poetry, is a lecturer on poetry at Mills College, where he is working on a project for the study of the nature and development of talent. He was editor of the *Actavist* issue of *Poetry* of Chicago, *Ideas of Order in Experimental Poetry* and others.

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